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43rd District



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2001 Transportation Report

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43rd District**
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2001

Transportation Report

Fall 2001

Dear Neighbors,

Our world changed dramatically on September 11th, and we are all struggling to understand and respond to this incomprehensible tragedy. We all grieve for the thousands of family members and friends who have suffered such terrible loss.

The Legislature, too, is struggling with what happened on September 11th – and the implications for our state. The Boeing layoffs and general economic downturn are not only hurting individuals and families – they are having a major impact on the state budget. Budget reductions will clearly be one of the major issues in our upcoming legislative session.

The other major issue will be the serious business left undone as the 2001 Legislative Session ended. We did not pass a long-range plan to improve roads, relieve congestion and hasten the movement of goods and supplies on our highways.

As I've talked with and heard from many of you, often the same questions are raised: Why and how did we get into this mess? Why isn't there enough transportation money? If people are driving more, why doesn't the gas tax raise enough money to meet our needs? How are we going to resolve this issue?

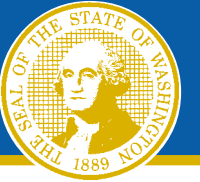
These are important questions and they need to be answered. We can't solve a problem until we understand what it is. This newsletter has information to answer some key questions related to transportation in our state. For those of you wishing additional detail, you can access the DOT website at www.wsdot.wa.gov, or you can call me. I'll be glad to talk with you about transportation or other issues. You can call my district office at 206-720-3074.

Our caucus will be discussing how to address transportation issues in the coming months and I would greatly appreciate your opinions and ideas to better inform my positions on the critical subject.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Ed Murray

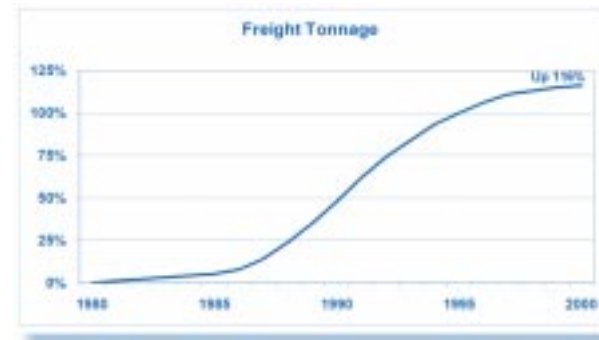


What's going on with Washington's transportation system?

Washington State is in a serious transportation crisis. We have ended up in this situation because over the last twenty years we have not invested enough in our transportation system at a time of booming population growth and burgeoning economic activity.

Since 1980, population growth, vehicle registrations, vehicle miles traveled and movement of freight have risen sharply.

Since 1980, the tonnage of goods and freight moved by road in the state has grown by 116%



Meanwhile, transportation spending adjusted for inflation has remained the same since 1980.

Investment has not kept pace.



Total capital outlays on the transportation system directed through the Department of Transportation actually have not grown on an inflation-adjusted basis (1980 dollars).

But what about the gas tax? Aren't we collecting more than ever?

Yes, and no. Each penny of gas tax generates \$32 million per year. The 23 cents we pay generates \$736 million per year, or roughly \$1.5 billion per biennium. The state receives a total of \$2.2 billion in transportation revenue every two years, making the gas tax the largest single source of revenue. With federal funds and bonding (borrowing), we can get that up to \$3.8 billion. With \$200 billion in unmet transportation needs predicted during the next 20 years, we're falling farther behind.

The gas tax has not been raised in ten years. If adjusted for inflation, our 23-cent gas tax would be 37 cents. While total dollars collected are indeed growing, the spending power of total collections is not much different from 1980. This is because of inflation, higher construction costs, improved fuel efficiency and the fact that increased numbers of people, cars and miles driven translate into higher highway maintenance costs and greater need for more new lanes and roads.

Based on our investment patterns, our predicament was inevitable. Roads are jammed with vehicles. Bridges need repairs. Highway safety corrections are overdue. Ferries are past their retirement. Major pavement rehabilitation costs loom for interstates. Transit and other alternative transit modes struggle to mobilize the assets needed to deliver adequate service levels. Railroad crossings need grade separation. Transportation services to rural areas need strengthening. The list goes on.

What about efficiencies?

The Legislature passed some key efficiency measures this year including:

1) permit streamlining to speed the transportation planning process; 2) a measure to allow large projects to be designed and built by the same contractor; and 3) rights-of-way purchasing authority, allowing the DOT to purchase land needed for construction early in the process, before prices skyrocket. We continue to search for other efficiencies to assure that we are spending our transportation dollars effectively, but efficiencies alone will not solve our problem.

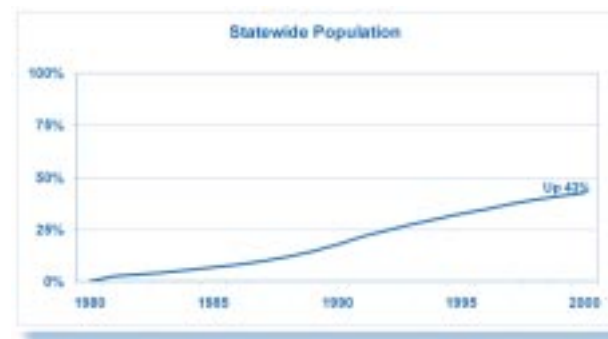
What are we going to do?

All of us have felt the impacts of traffic gridlock, whether losing time with our families, arriving late for work, missing an appointment or eating a cold dinner. A recent study estimates that the average person in the central Puget Sound loses \$930 per year to fuel costs and time lost sitting in traffic. Clearly, something must be done to address this problem.

I remain committed to developing a statewide transportation funding plan that offers commuters real transportation choices. I also consider it critical that local communities have decision-making authority about transportation improvements and taxing options that affect traffic in their communities. We came close to passing such a plan, but unfortunately partisan politics prevented us from completing this effort. Although we had the support of the Governor, Senate Democrats, House Democrats and Senate Republicans, our Republican colleagues in the House refused to join us in support of a compromise plan.



Since 1980, the state's population has grown by 43%



Since 1980, motor vehicle registrations in the state have grown by 57%



Since 1980, vehicle miles driven in the state have grown by 88%

